

North Carolina's Department of Commerce
The Division of Workforce Development
North Carolina's State of the Workforce
Community Stakeholder Sessions
Lenoir, Greensboro, and Kinston, March 26-28, 2007

April 23, 2007

North Carolina State of the Workforce Regional Sessions

The following represent the common themes and a synopsis of the recommendations offered during the three regional sessions held in Lenoir, Greensboro, and Kinston, March 26-28, 2007. They have been organized according to the stated focus areas for sub-committee assignments.

In sum, a key theme from the discussion was the clear need for the Workforce Commission to take a leadership role in encouraging the state to respond to the issues raised in the State of the Workforce study. As one participant stated, "This report is a clarion call to action... [We must] implement plans to do something about it." Assuming no new resources, many asked what could be done to drive needed outcomes. Their attention appears to focus primarily on transforming the workforce development delivery system, changing the culture of K-12 in the state to become more proactive in anticipating or responding to economic changes, and creating a different kind of parental/home environment that places a greater emphasis on continuous training and education.

However, most participants assumed that the state would need to invest in developing a more competitive workforce. Several ideas proposed bold new strategies aimed at improving educational attainment and providing a boost for those groups and regions being left behind in this economic transformation. A critical element of a successful response will involve leveraging greater stakeholder involvement, especially among business and education leaders.

The key themes discussed, their relevant policy questions, and stakeholder recommendations included:

Valuing Education Themes

- ◆ The critical role of secondary and post-secondary career and technical education investments in preparing a competitive workforce
- ◆ The need for a concerted education campaign to promote value of education and to educate current and future workers about the possibilities that education can provide
- ◆ Concern for dropouts and graduation rate
- ◆ Concern for the engagement of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in the dialogue
- ◆ The need for communicating the study results and its implications to a broader audience and following up on certain aspects of the findings

Relevant Education Policy Questions

- ◆ How can we help students, parents, and state leaders fully understand the value of education?

- ◆ How can we help more students to complete high school and post-secondary educational degree programs?
- ◆ How do we create a more systemic education and training system that links all levels of education to more life-long learning opportunities?

Policy Recommendations from Stakeholders

- ◆ Initiate and sustain a state-wide marketing effort to promote post-secondary education
 - Encourage individual North Carolinians to adopt as a core personal value that he or she should seek to continue his or her education
 - Establish as a policy goal and a social compact with the people of North Carolina to improve educational attainment levels to meet the demand for jobs requiring higher education
 - Educate our citizens about the vast array of learning opportunities
 - Explain the importance of training as well as education in improving career and personal skills
 - Provide better and more visible career information about jobs (e.g., skilled trades) that require technical skills and offer opportunities for economic mobility
 - Educate workers and education/training providers that the workplace is moving more toward “project-based employment” (in which workers are increasingly “free agents” rather than “contract players”)
 - Provide explicit evidence that individuals with higher educational attainment earn more and live more prosperous lives (illustrate this evidence and make it real)
 - Develop messages that value all jobs and describes the importance of all levels of education (not just 4 year degrees) for many of those jobs
 - Educate parents about all educational opportunities/alternatives
 - Describe the talents and skills required to access the high-end “thinking” jobs to provide stretch goals for the state’s workforce
- ◆ Adopt a statewide plan to make community college education free for all NC residents
 - Recognize in this plan that community colleges currently receive only a small portion of current education dollars
 - Establish additional funding to continue efforts to make post-secondary education more accessible
 - Implement a plan to ensure that the colleges are accountable for their performance

- ◆ Increase the profile and effectiveness of career and technical education (CTE) as a resource to improve educational attainment
 - Increase funding for GED programs and vocational programs in high school and community colleges
 - Engage broader business and economic development leadership in shaping the design of secondary career and technical education
 - Develop more extensive, technically-oriented CTE programs for career-track high school students
 - Combine academic and career and technical education
 - Adopt CTE in middle schools to help set the stage for individuals to learn technical skills at an earlier age
 - Allow (and encourage) teachers to use non-traditional teaching methods and tools to help motivate students
 - Review the recent NC system requirement for all high school students to take college-prep to accommodate the increased need for technical skills
 - Provide greater incentives to encourage community colleges to provide technical training related to work
 - Develop CTE programs designed to bridge the curriculum demands of community colleges and universities
- ◆ Educate employers about career readiness certification
 - Use the “career readiness certificate” the basis for employer hiring
 - Examine the use of WORK KEYS by private industry and communicate what is learned from this research to employers
 - Integrate “employability,” “life,” and related “social” skills training as a component of education and training
 - Encourage employers to utilize career readiness certificates as a hiring evaluation criterion
 - Integrate skill development efforts to encourage entrepreneurship and financial literacy as part of career readiness certification process
- ◆ Adopt higher education policies designed to attract and retain more talent from out of state
 - Provide lower out of state tuition to attract highly educated to the state or more financial aid for those out-of-state students that decide to stay in the state
 - Provide in-state tuition for all NC high school graduates
 - Make higher education more affordable to all residents
 - Make virtual education more of a reality

- ◆ Reduce the current number of dropouts and the dropout rate
 - Conduct research about best practices around the US and in other countries
 - and disseminate information to policy makers about best practices for keeping students in school
 - Provide resources to implement best practice efforts aimed at helping to prevent high school drop-outs
 - Raise the legal age to dropout from 16 years old to 18 years old
 - Balance the need for increasing high school graduation requirements (for class of 2012) with efforts to enhance graduation rates
- ◆ Increase the state's investment in Pre-school education
- ◆ Encourage DPI to participate more actively in discussions about the future of the state's workforce
 - Create new incentives for public school system to shift from its exclusive focus on test indicators and preparing students for college to address the wide array of student needs (including drop-out prevention and technical education)
 - Institute performance based pay for all educators
 - Stress increased access to counseling for students on career opportunities rather than managing testing procedures and results
 - Create a more seamless transition between the higher and secondary educational systems
 - Develop and communicate to the public a proactive plan to address the teacher supply shortage
 - Remove 6-month waiting period for teachers to rejoin labor force on a part time basis
- ◆ Identify and replicate existing model efforts
 - Duplicate the Fayetteville State University on-campus high school (has a graduation rate of 98%)
 - Create career and technical education high schools (akin to technical high schools)
 - Make more students and parents aware of dual enrolment opportunities; in high school while taking community college credit courses (very successful for those who take advantage of them)
 - Establish military prep schools for at-risk students (i.e., potential dropouts)
- ◆ Continue efforts to align education and training with available job opportunities
 - Update the analysis on an on-going basis (10 year projections are too far out to be accurate)

- ◆ Develop regional workshops to disseminate the State of the Workforce data
 - To stakeholders employed by and enrolled in public schools and community colleges
 - To school administrators, teachers, parents, and students at seminars and career fairs
 - To businesses people throughout the state
 - To non-education, non-workforce audiences so they will understand the profound need for policy change related to public school
- ◆ Implement a plan to ensure that the public schools are more accountable for their performance
- ◆ Limit resources available to training programs that cannot demonstrate evidence that jobs are available for training completers
- ◆ Develop a strategy for dealing with workers who are not interested in jobs or who cannot pass drug tests

Middle Job Loss Themes

- ◆ Providing incentives for businesses and individuals to invest in training, especially for currently working in at-risk industries or occupations
- ◆ Integration of economic development, workforce development and education investments
- ◆ Bridging the large gap between the labor force requirements of fast-growing technical jobs and the dislocated workforce with obsolete skills
- ◆ The need for taking action to provide alternatives to fast-growing low-wage, low-skill jobs
- ◆ A critical role for community colleges in preparing the “new middle” wage workforce that will require post-secondary education and training to compete

Relevant Middle Job Loss Policy Questions

- ◆ How do we respond to the workforce needs of the current and future workers in traditional industries?
- ◆ How do we balance the need for adopting new products and/or processes to help companies compete globally even if job losses may result?
- ◆ How do we support people currently working in these industries pursuing education and training that would qualify them for new middle jobs?
- ◆ How do we ensure that fast growing, low wage industries identify career pathways that would allow workers to earn family sustaining wage?

- ◆ How do we encourage marginally skilled workers who enter low wage industries to pursue training certification while they work with the goal of qualifying for better jobs?
- ◆ How do we help low wage service companies use technology to create greater numbers of high wage, high skilled occupations?

Policy Recommendations from Stakeholders

- ◆ Provide a comparative analysis that defines a vision for a “healthy economy” in the state
 - Provide a historical analysis of the workforce that balances the positive growth that has occurred in the state’s economy with the negative trends
- ◆ Research and recognize the impact of the numerous current efforts underway to improve workforce skills exist
 - Evaluate the impact of these current efforts (e.g., incumbent worker training and focused industrial training)
 - Identify resource needs required for increasing the capacity of the more successful of these efforts
- ◆ Provide additional resources and incentives to encourage businesses to participate in up-grading their existing workforce
 - Encourage more private employers to require a HS diploma for young adults to qualify for a job
 - Create tax incentives/credits to industries who provide opportunities to their workforce for educational development and training, including GED education, especially in at-risk industries
 - Champion an apprenticeship tax credit bill that would give employers an incentive to train their employees.
 - Provide more resources to leverage greater cooperation between businesses seeking to training/retrain their workers for specific skills and community colleges
 - Increase investment in training programs designed to provide skills for designing, building, and maintaining the equipment required for production manufacturing
 - Provide financial incentives to companies based on educational level of production worker (e.g., 90% of the employees have at least a high school diploma)
 - Encourage employers to sponsor on-site training and education programs

- ◆ Provide incentives to existing workers (especially in at-risk occupations and/or industries) that seek education and training opportunities while they remain employed
 - Provide additional resources to help the community college system recruit the best instructors for curricula serving these targeted occupations
 - Recognize that a highly skilled workforce is a powerful economic development tool and a powerful incentive
 - Focus NC's education and training efforts on building a surplus of skilled technicians as part of a strategy to create a competitive edge over other states to attract and retain our industry base.
- ◆ Integrate small business development and entrepreneurship into the strategic approach for enhancing workforce skills
 - Put more emphasis on small business development and expansion
 - Bridge skills needs of business with skills development of our young people
 - Recognize that entrepreneurial skills will be integral to the success of increasing numbers of workers
- ◆ Provide additional resources for the community college system to target expanded training in high growth industries, especially those that offer opportunities in the "middle job" gap
- ◆ Develop strategies to link dislocated workers with job opportunities, especially those that have already received retraining from the community colleges
 - Re-prioritize investments in training programs to provide more resources for the needs of displaced workers (currently the budget for these programs is being cut)
 - Develop better mechanisms for sharing information with dislocated workers about job opportunities
 - Provide better transportation alternatives to jobs that may not be located in the dislocated worker's community
 - Provide economic support to displaced workers who want to pursue entrepreneurship
 - Examine the impact of the Trade Act benefits on the behaviors of laid off workers to determine whether these benefits delay re-entry to the workforce
- ◆ Institute economic development strategies aimed at helping companies employing "low-skill, low-wage" employees to improve their productivity and competitive edge as a way to reduce the projected demand for low-skill jobs and drive up wages in these industries
 - Change state economic development policy to provide more support to entrepreneurial organizations vs. Dell, Google, Ups who are not

- ◆ Align our K-16 education system with these economic and workforce development goals
 - Help our post-secondary policy focus more on 2-year degrees and certifications as an avenue for worker success
 - Develop K-12 programs aimed expanding the technical workforce

Geographic Disparity Themes

- ◆ A flexible statewide response that recognizes the unique challenges facing different parts of the state
- ◆ Responses that encourage regional partners together to come together to overcome fragmented delivery of economic development, education, and workforce development programs
- ◆ Provision of incentives for both individuals to stay, and business to locate and to stay

Relevant Geographic Disparity Policy Questions

- ◆ How do we help micropolitan and rural areas generate demand for and attract skilled workers?
- ◆ How do we train our most skilled workers and college graduates, particularly those from disadvantaged regions?
- ◆ How do we better connect skilled workers and recent graduates (from NC and elsewhere) to available job opportunities in North Carolina?

Policy Recommendations from Stakeholders

- ◆ Diversify representation geographically on the Workforce Commission to ensure all parts of the state are fully represented
- ◆ Encourage cooperation among communities within the state to develop unique responses to economic transformation
 - Create strong state incentives to encourage regional collaboration to address the identified challenges
 - Develop flexible state policies to meet the divergent needs of the state's regions and sub-regions
- ◆ Create incentives and mechanisms designed to overcome the fragmented delivery system and encourage greater collaboration among workforce development, education, and economic development organizations
 - Have our community colleges to work in clusters to share resources

- ◆ Develop policies aimed at attracting and retaining businesses and people in rural and micropolitan communities
 - Provide economic incentives to potential employers aimed at encouraging them to locate in rural and micropolitan areas
 - Provide incentives to individuals who choose to stay in rural areas
 - Ensure that micropolitan and rural areas have access to high-speed internet (key infrastructure required for knowledge jobs)
- ◆ Establish a dialogue in Raleigh about the challenges facing many parts of the state, including the East and the West
 - Recognize that certain parts of the state are paralyzed by poverty
 - Develop different solutions in the State's Eastern and Western areas aimed at overcoming the disadvantages of lower income
- ◆ Devise policies aimed at helping the state's metropolitan economies to help them continue succeeding

Changing Workforce Demographics Themes

- ◆ The recognition that the workforce is becoming increasingly Hispanic, with different education and training needs
- ◆ The impact of an increased number of retirees on the workplace
- ◆ The need for coherent policies about certain key components of the workforce, including dislocated workers, illegal immigrants, and/or ex-offenders

Relevant Changing Workforce Demographics Policy Questions

- ◆ How can North Carolina better leverage its array of skilled and experienced workers (military, trades, technicians, executives, etc.) beyond retirement?
- ◆ What kind of incentives can the state offer to encourage experienced workers to remain in the workforce, either full-time or part-time, after retirement age?
- ◆ What kinds of shifts in workplace culture and/or increases in entrepreneurial opportunities should the state consider to motivate older workers?
- ◆ Should North Carolina advocate changes in the federal tax system relative to retirement income and in the social security system to provide incentives for older workers to continue in the workforce?
- ◆ How do we prepare our education, training and workforce systems for NC's growing number of workers that frequently don't have a high school diploma and do not speak English?

- ◆ How do we better assimilate a workforce from different cultures and leverage them as economic assets for the state?

Policy Recommendations from Stakeholders

- ◆ Develop a state plan for addressing the challenges and opportunities related to the influx of illegal immigrants
 - Evaluate the cost of illegal immigration on the economy and the state's revenue base
 - Develop more detailed estimates of illegal immigration into North Carolina
 - Identify potential initiatives that would provide educational opportunities for in-migrant students but that does not provide an advantage over the existing students who are seeking to access higher education
- ◆ Recognize the unique education and training needs of the state's growing Hispanic population
 - Recognize the large portion of the state's Hispanic population that has an education and are native English speakers
- ◆ Develop better outreach efforts targeted to in-migrants and international residents seeking employment opportunities
- ◆ Develop and share methodologies for increasing access to training opportunities for incumbent workers in declining industries
 - Focus on efforts that motivate under-skilled workers to seek education and training opportunities
- ◆ Encourage retirees in the state to consider "second" careers
 - Increase maximum allowable earnings for retired state employees who want to return to the workforce
 - Address age discrimination of the employer community
- ◆ Recognize the important contributions that ex-offenders can make to the economy
 - Define how the increased number of ex-offenders entering the workforce will affect the job supply
 - Identify ways that the ex-offender population to meet our supply needs